United Nations S/PV.7204

Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7204th meeting
Monday, 23 June 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. De Antueno
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Llanos
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Rwanda	Mr. Gasana
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506. Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

14-43765 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: I brief today against the backdrop of many unsettling developments in the region. Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. With peace negotiations suspended since the end of April and despite the restraint initially displayed by both sides, the situation on the ground has turned highly volatile with several disturbing developments. Intensive search operations in the West Bank for the three Israeli students abducted near Hebron are ongoing with a corresponding increase in violence in the West Bank. The hunger strike by Palestinian administrative and other detainees since 24 April is now in its sixty-first day. New settlement units have been announced. And the fragile calm in Gaza was interrupted by multiple rockets fired at Israel, and the Israeli military response. All these issues, on which the United Nations has pronounced itself unequivocally, can be addressed only if the parties act responsibly and with restraint. Only then can any renewed attempt by the parties to find their way back to meaningful negotiations and to address the much lacking political horizon, in order to avert further escalation, take hold. International engagement and support for that effort should remain unwavering.

The reporting period also witnessed significant political developments on both sides. On 2 June, President Abbas announced the formation of a Government of national consensus headed by Prime Minister Hamdallah on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization commitments of recognition of Israel, non-violence and adherence to previous agreements. The Palestinian President added that elections would be organized within six months. On 10 June, Israel elected long-time member and two-time Speaker Reuven Rivlin of the Knesset as the next President to succeed Shimon Peres.

The situation in the West Bank — already tense with demonstrations in support of Palestinian detainees — has worsened. In the evening of 12 June, three Israeli students — a 19-year-old and two 16-year-olds — were reported missing. Their abduction has been roundly condemned, including by the Secretary-General, who has expressed his outrage publicly and in a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Israel blamed the abduction on Hamas, an allegation Hamas has reportedly since denied. We nevertheless find Hamas statements glorifying the perpetrators of that act to be outrageous. If Hamas involvement is corroborated, that would indeed constitute a grave development.

Search operations by Israeli security forces have extended to the rest of the West Bank, including in major population centres. Israeli authorities also implemented tightened movement restrictions, including prohibiting men from Hebron between the ages of 20 and 50 years from crossing the Allenby Bridge into Jordan, the only international crossing for West Bankers. We are concerned by reports that over 350 Palestinians have now been arrested, many injured and four Palestinians killed, including one minor on 20 June. The rising death toll as a result of Israeli security operations in the West Bank is alarming. We condemn all killings of civilians and call for an investigation into any such deaths. Reportedly, the Israeli Cabinet also voted to impose harsher conditions on detainees affiliated with Hamas who are in Israeli custody.

As the search for the missing youths continues, we call for restraint in carrying out the security operations, in strict compliance with international law and while avoiding punishing individuals for offences they have not personally committed. Detentions included those of reported Hamas affiliates and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, notably Speaker Aziz Dweik, as well as over 50 Palestinians previously released as part of the so-called "Shalit deal".

Palestinian security forces continued their work to maintain law and order. Earlier, on 5 June, Palestinian security forces reportedly uncovered and seized in Hebron explosives, knives, flags and military uniforms allegedly belonging to Hamas.

Overall, since our last briefing (see S/PV.7178), Israeli security forces carried out a total of 607 search and arrest operations and detained an estimated 928 Palestinians. Five Palestinians were shot dead, including during search operations for the missing, and 291 injured, including during demonstrations against the barrier and in support of Palestinians in administrative detention. Twelve Israeli security forces personnel were also injured. We are alarmed that there are significant increases in all of those categories since our last briefing.

Settler attacks, on the rise during this period, resulted in 18 Palestinians injured, including three children, and damage to Palestinian property. Palestinian attacks, mostly consisting of stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing, resulted in injuries to seven Israelis. The Israeli authorities have not disclosed yet the findings of their investigation into the deaths of two Palestinian youths on 15 May.

Settlement activity, illegal under international law, continued apace with the announcement on 4 June of the issuance of tenders for over 1,400 new settlement units in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem, and reports that the Israeli authorities had advanced plans for some 1,000 settlement housing units following Prime Minister Netanyahu's reported decision to unfreeze planning processes for 1,800 settlement units. On 18 June, 172 settlement units were announced in the settlement of Har Homa, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The demolition of 65 Palestinian structures resulted in the displacement of some 112 Palestinians, including 56 children. Israeli authorities destroyed or seized a total of 28 donor-funded humanitarian assistance items, including on 5 June of a water and sanitation consignment en route to a vulnerable Bedouin community in Al-Ganoub, in the southern West Bank.

The Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights remain gravely concerned about the deteriorating health of those Palestinian prisoners on prolonged hunger strikes. Both have repeatedly called attention to the situation of prisoners on administrative detention and reiterated their long-standing position that administrative detainees should be charged or released without delay. The United Nations is concerned about the Government-sponsored legislative amendment before the Israeli Knesset that, if adopted, would permit force-feeding and medical treatment of prisoners on hunger strike against their will under certain conditions, in contravention of international standards. The Government-sponsored bill passed its first reading in the Knesset on 9 June, despite strong objections raised by national and international medical and human rights organizations.

Tensions also continued around the holy sites in the Old City. Since our last briefing, access restrictions were imposed on several occasions on Palestinians, and clashes between worshippers and Israeli security forces resulted in tens of Palestinians injured and detained, including on 13 June. We call on all parties to show the utmost restraint regarding the holy compound and to fully respect the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths.

In Gaza, the prevailing calm started unraveling, especially following the abduction of the Israeli students. Since our last briefing, a total of 39 rockets and four mortar shells were fired towards Israel. Two rockets exploded at launching sites and 17 dropped short in Gaza, injuring two Palestinian girls on 16 June. Three rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome system, but four mortar shells and 19 rockets landed in open areas of Israel, including two near the city of Ashkelon, without resulting in injuries. Israel conducted a total of 5 incursions and 38 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in the death of a Palestinian militant and a seven year-old child. Another Palestinian civilian died on 8 June from injuries after being shot at by the Israeli Navy on 26 May. A total of 10 Palestinian militants and eight Palestinian civilians were injured by Israeli fire. We continue to condemn indiscriminate rocket firing against civilians as well as any loss of civilian life. We further call on all Palestinian factions to adhere to the calm as per the understandings reached in the lead-up to the unity agreement. Of chief importance is the need to support the Palestinian Authority's efforts to take up security functions in Gaza and to unify the security forces under one legitimate authority.

The persisting dire socioeconomic situation as the result of a tightened access regime and continued violence has seriously complicated prospects for the new Government of national consensus in assuming its functions and delivering tangible improvements to the lives of Gazans, which the United Nations had pledged to support. The tension over the payment of salaries is but one manifestation of the immediate challenges as the Palestinian Authority attempts to reunify the institutions. Existing acute de-development indicators remain of concern, including rates of food insecurity

at 57 percent, and unemployment at 41 percent, disproportionately affecting youth.

Much of Gaza's challenges still require structural solutions, which remain unaddressed. Following the abduction incident on 12 June and the ensuing rocket firing, the Kerem Shalom crossing was closed from 15 to 17 June but for the transfer of fuel supplies; it has been re-opened fully since 18 June. Since our last report to the Council, there have been no approvals for the resumption of additional United Nations construction projects, and pre-approved work stalled as a result of the crossings being closed. Open crossings, both for goods and people, access to construction material, re-establishing trade links between the West Bank and Gaza, and exports are as urgently needed as ever to kickstart the economy and create job opportunities. Rafah was only open for seven days during the reporting period.

Under the current strenuous circumstances, although it will not be easy, the United Nations will continue to deliver assistance to the people in Gaza in close cooperation with the newly appointed ministers.

Turning to Lebanon, the constitutional deadline to elect a new President expired on 25 May. Presidential powers transferred to the Council of Ministers under the leadership of Prime Minister Salam, in accordance with the Constitution. Seven parliamentary sessions have been called so far, but the necessary quorum was not achieved. We again underline the urgency for Lebanon's leaders to ensure the election of a President without further delay and stress the importance for the Government meanwhile to discharge its responsibilities effectively.

The security situation has remained relatively calm with the implementation since April of security plans for Tripoli and the Bekaa. However, a suicide car bomb at a security checkpoint in Dahr Al-Baidar on 20 June killed a member of the internal security forces. The bombing coincided with an extensive police raid in Beirut's district of Hamra in which several suspects were arrested after security agencies received information about possible new terror attacks, which resulted in raising the state of alert in Beirut and elsewhere. In the past month, there have also been at least five air strikes by Syrian aircraft in Lebanese territory and three cross-border shelling incidents from Syria.

More than 1.1 million Syrian refugees are now registered in Lebanon. On 31 May, the Interior Minister announced that Syrian refugees who returned to Syria would lose their refugee status in Lebanon. Restrictions on the entry of Palestine refugees from Syria have been reintroduced. The situation in Palestinian camps remains of concern, with an explosion in Ain Al-Hilweh on 19 May, allegedly targeting a Fatah official. Faction leaders have sought to coordinate with Lebanese authorities to address the concerns, especially in Ain Al-Hilweh.

In Rome on 17 June, the Government of Italy hosted a ministerial conference within the framework of the International Support Group for Lebanon on support to the Lebanese armed forces. Participants from 43 delegations welcomed the announcement of new assistance to the Lebanese Army and encouraged further assistance in priority areas. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained generally calm and stable, despite almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese air space.

Turning to Syria, on 20 June the Secretary-General reiterated his deep concerns about the continued levels of violence and human suffering and destruction in Syria, and I would like to reiterate the six points he offered on Friday as a way to help address the situation in a principled and integrated fashion.

Ending the violence is the most immediate priority. It is essential that the flow of arms and fighters pouring into the country be stemmed. In order to achieve that, an arms embargo must be imposed. Local ceasefire arrangements, however imperfect, are taking place and are enabling us to deliver much-needed aid and to curtail the levels of violence. We should turn those war agreements into peace agreements. Such an arrangement was reached most recently in Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus over the weekend.

Secondly, we must do our utmost to protect the human rights, safety and dignity of the Syrian people, 3.5 million of whom are in hard-to-reach locations. The sieges must end and immediate, unfettered humanitarian access across internal front lines and borders must be allowed.

Thirdly, we desperately need new efforts to start a serious political process for a new Syria. The Secretary-General will soon name a new envoy, who

must be afforded full cooperation and support by all international and regional actors.

Fourthly, any credible peace process will have to address the question of ensuring accountability for the serious crimes that have been committed by all sides.

Fifthly, while a major landmark was achieved today with the removal of the last remaining identified chemicals, finishing the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria remains an imperative. The joint effort of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations has been essential in reinforcing the global norm prohibiting chemical weapons.

Sixthly, and finally, the prolongation of the conflict in Syria has created fertile ground for radical armed groups, including those affiliated with Al-Qaida. Recent events in Iraq have demonstrated vividly that the Syrian conflict can have devastating impact on neighbouring countries and far beyond.

Recent serious incidents along the area of separation supervised by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) are a further grave reminder of the risk of regional escalation caused by the Syrian conflict. Yesterday, approximately 300 metres north of UNDOF position 52, firing from the Bravo side to the Alpha side killed an Israeli teenager and injured three Israeli contractors, including the teenager's father, who were carrying out work along the Israeli technical fence. The Israel Defence Forces retaliated with several rounds of tank fire and again with air strikes in the early hours today. UNDOF personnel in the area went into shelter and were not affected, and UNDOF is currently investigating the incident. All involved should exercise the utmost restraint, respect their mutual obligations and halt firing of any kind across the ceasefire line.

We are facing a moment of real crisis that is testing the region in new ways. Negative forces on multiple fronts in the Middle East continue to draw strength by sowing strife and frustrating viable options for a political solution. We should take this as a wake-up call that challenges all of us to work together to restore the prospects for a durable regional peace. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, both sides have a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint in order to contain what has rapidly developed into a critical security situation on the ground, restore calm and create opportunities to return to a negotiating process. This is a time for renewed impetus and political will aimed at ending the conflict and the occupation that have already scarred the lives of far too many Israelis and Palestinians for far too long. We must work together now to build a better future for the people of the region.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I also want to express our collective appreciation to the Special Representatives and special coordinators of the United Nations, their teams and the United Nations country teams, who are working so heroically and diligently in this region, helping to address the challenges I have outlined in today's briefing.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.